

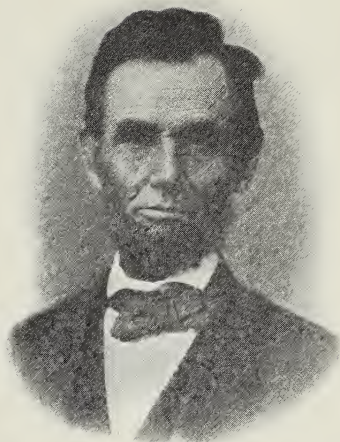
PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S
THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION
OCTOBER 3, 1863

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies: To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

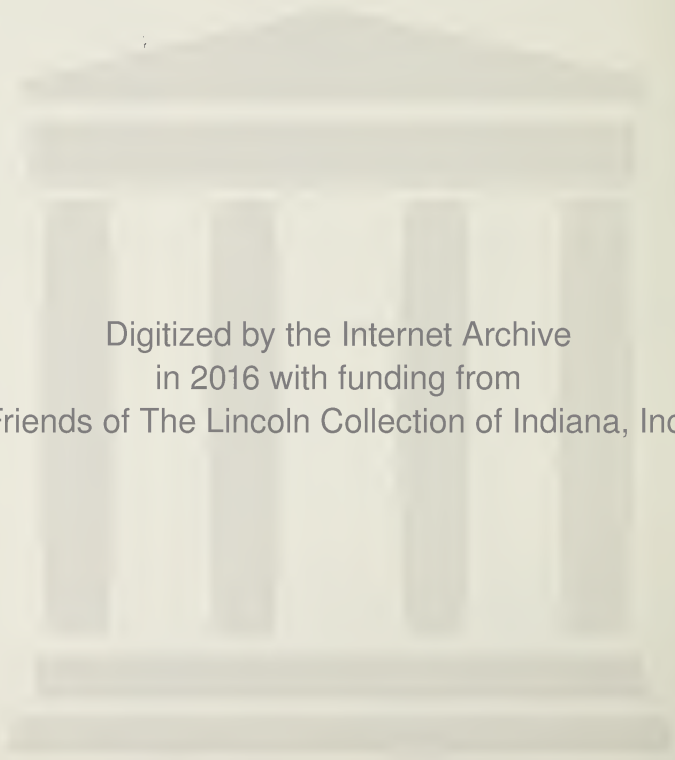
No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the most high God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up ascriptions justly due to him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and union.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

The Curious Story Of Thanksgiving



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THE
CURIOUS STORY
OF

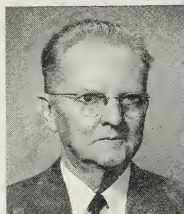
Thanksgiving

Reprinted from
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1956

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FOREWORD

To many persons Thanksgiving Day means divine services, turkey and trimmings, and family gatherings. The following publication, briefly narrating the history of this distinctly American holiday, originally appeared in the November, 1955, issue of ARAMCO WORLD, a publication of the Arabian American Oil Company.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this reprint in the hope that it will prove interesting and informative to Library patrons.

sweet wine. The Pilgrims knew about mince pie, but objected to it because it was a favorite dish of the Stuart kings and symbolized English Christmas, an unhappy memory.

The three-day festival was a great success. Friendship between the Indians and the Pilgrims was solidified, and everyone seemed happy. Yet it was fifty years before the Plymouth Pilgrims held another Thanksgiving Day feast. No one seems to know why, although some historians assume that the presence of so many Indians discouraged a repetition.

The idea caught on with the Massachusetts Bay Puritans and the Dutch in New Amsterdam, and they decided on such a holiday nine years later. It had nothing to do with feasting, dancing, sports, or harvests -- for it was held on July 8, 1630. Two years later, however, they switched to October to celebrate a fine crop. Thereafter, they held a feast every two years. It was the Puritans who brought religious significance to the holiday. They frowned on games and drinking on a day devoted to thanksgiving. Unlike the Plymouth Pilgrims, who were friendly with the Indians, the Puritans included in their celebrating the destruction of a large band of marauding braves a few days earlier.

For 200 years, Thanksgiving Day was strictly a New England holiday, proclaimed each year by governors and, occasionally, by presidents. The rest of the country looked askance at this Yankee holiday and suspiciously refused to recognize its existence.

George Washington proclaimed a day of thanksgiving for his army in 1782, granting each soldier an extra food ration and two new shirts. This helped to popularize the holiday, and many soldiers from southern states later returned to New England to celebrate Thanksgiving Day.

As President, Washington proposed the first national Thanksgiving Day in 1789 with the suggestion that the young nation give thanks for its new constitution and the end of the war. A hostile Congress almost nullified the idea. Southern congressmen vigorously opposed it, arguing that it smacked of Yankee propaganda. A South

Carolina representative claimed he didn't enjoy copying European customs and assailed the project with a long harangue. Despite these objections, Washington proclaimed November 26, 1789, as the first national Thanksgiving Day. But not again for six years did he name such a day.

President John Adams, however, liked the idea and, despite a still protesting Congress, called a holiday in May, 1789, and another in April, 1799 -- neither having anything to do with the original intent of celebrating harvests. Somewhere along the line the joy over good crops expressed by feasting, sporting games, and dancing was almost completely lost.

It was President Thomas Jefferson who really dealt the holiday an almost mortal blow. He maintained that it was becoming too religious an observance and as President he would adhere to the proposition that the Church and State should be separated. He, therefore, refused to proclaim Thanksgiving Day during his entire administration. New Englanders, in angry retort, continued with state-proclaimed celebrations and one clerical critic went so far as to say in a sermon: "O Lord, endow the President with a goodly portion of Thy grace, for Thou, O Lord, knowest he needs it."

Pressure for the holiday observance was very strong in Massachusetts, but Gov. Elbridge Gerry, a rabid Jeffersonian, found a way to circumvent it. He issued a proclamation -- but it took two hours to read it before the usual church services began. By the time the order was read most of the parishioners had scattered to their homes to cook the big dinners, and the ministers faced empty pews.

Jefferson's attitude was not a solitary protest -- actually, it lasted sixty years as President after President followed suit. It appeared that Thanksgiving Day as a national holiday was doomed. But in 1855, three states in the South made a dramatic about face. Georgia, Texas, and Virginia decided to mark the holiday.

Sara Josepha Hale, who wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb," was the greatest single influence in establishing the day as a national legal holiday. As editor of Godey's

Lady's Book, the most famous women's magazine of the time, she wrote impassioned articles, editorials, letters, and appeals, imploring every President to act on behalf of a national Thanksgiving Day. In 1863, her appeal finally caught the fancy of President Lincoln. In a year that saw the bloody battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Lincoln responded by issuing his first Thanksgiving Day proclamation -- marking the actual start of our modern observance of the holiday on the last Thursday in November.

Curious reasons for celebrating the day were given throughout its history. President Madison cited the victory in the Battle of New Orleans; Lincoln was thankful that no foreign power had attacked the Union during the Civil War; Grant blessed the huge influx of immigrants in 1876; and Hayes rejoiced because there were no shipwrecks or major disasters. Grover Cleveland was the first President to refer to the "reunion of families" in his proclamation.

But Thanksgiving Day's rough voyage toward national acceptance was still to face the rapids of national discontent. In 1939 President Franklin D. Roosevelt, at the request of businessmen all over the country, who wanted more shopping time between Thanksgiving and Christmas, suggested that the day be proclaimed on the third Thursday in November. This change, actually, was not such an innovation, since the date had shifted continuously through eight months in a period of 300 years. The nation however, broke into loud protest, and twenty-three states refused to abide by the new date. In fact, to appease all sides, Texas and Colorado held two Thanksgiving Days.

After three years of confusion and protest President Roosevelt, in 1942, agreed to return to the old date. Congress then passed a resolution legalizing the fourth Thursday in November as national Thanksgiving Day.

Some of the traditions of this eventful day have strange origins. While retaining its religious significance, Thanksgiving Day is still, primarily, an harvest celebration. The traditional football games, the raffles, turkey shoots, and the feasting are all reminders of the original joyous celebration of a bountiful crop, the testing of skills

and swordplay of the early celebrants.

This is true of harvest festivals all over the world. Through hundreds of years, European countries had developed special rituals to celebrate this season. In Austria, November 15 is known as St. Leopold's or Goose Day. Traditionally, huge goose dinners mark the beginning of the new wine season, and people travel to the Klosterneuburg Abbey (built in the 12th Century) to slide down the great 12,000 gallon wine cask in the festive ritual of good luck. Feasting and drinking are the marks of the great October Festival held each year at Munich, Germany. Many countries, such as Czechoslovakia, use the corn maiden as the traditional harvest symbol. Field workers fashion a great wreath of corn and flowers, and the woman who binds the last sheaf is called "baba". The wreaths and babas become the center of celebrations in all villages, and there is widespread merrymaking. In China the 15th day of the Eighth Moon is called the Moon Festival, marking the end of the harvest season, and one of the most joyous events in the Chinese year. All activity centers upon the moon, which influences the crops. Candies and cakes are baked in the shape of the moon while music, feasts, and games make up the day.

The turkey, the familiar symbol of our own holiday, was originally a wild bird known to Mexicans and Central Americans. Early Spanish explorers took the bird to Europe, and it made its way to Turkey, where it was domesticated. Finally, many years later, it found its way back to North America with the name of "turkey".

Yet the strangest twist of all is that the only country in the world where a national harvest festival day is a legal holiday through an act of Congress is the United States -- the mightiest industrial nation on earth.

